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HISTORICAL  
CONGREGATIONALISM.

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BY

REV. SAMUEL N. JACKSON, M.D.

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CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS  
TO THE  
CONGREGATIONAL UNION OF ONTARIO AND QUEBEC.



Toronto :  
CONGREGATIONAL PUBLISHING COMPANY.  
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*The* EDITH *and* LORNE PIERCE  
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*Queen's University at Kingston*

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## PREFACE.

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THE following pages contain what is called "The Chairman's Address," and which was delivered at the Twenty-eighth Annual Meeting of the Congregational Union of Ontario and Quebec, assembled in Zion Church, Toronto, June 9th, 1881. A resolution passed by the Union, requested that it should be printed in the Canada Congregational Year Book, which has been done. Aside from this there was quite a large demand for its publication in separate form, therefore this edition has been issued.

It is needless to say that the limits of a single address require such brevity, that, with so wide a subject, a bare synopsis could only be given. Should these pages, however, stimulate a desire to study Congregational History, one very desirable object will be attained. There is no branch of the Church of Christ which for the last three centuries has had a more noble or thrilling record than has Congregationalism. To those who wish to prosecute its study, we suggest that they commence with "Congregationalism as seen in its Literature" by the Rev. Henry M. Dexter, D.D., Boston, and the "History of Religion in England," by the Rev. Dr. Stoughton, London.

## HISTORICAL CONGREGATIONALISM.

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I have chosen this designation for my address, not because I am so insane as to suppose that I can give even a fair outline of a subject so great and wide—one which for nearly three centuries has been interwoven with the National Histories of English, American, and Colonial life—a subject which it would require many volumes to expound, and then not exhaust. I have chosen this title rather, because what I desire to say comes better under its designation than any other; and also for the reason that its latitude suffers me to wander throughout the earth and heaven, and dwell upon the past and present in relation to what is dear to us all.

While the first lines of Historical Congregationalism date from recent centuries, we claim that its principles are as old as Christianity; nay, more, that it is the ancient Theocracy with a divinely modified administration. As Congregationalists, we believe, not only in the supreme authority of God's Word, but also in its completeness as a divine revelation; and find in it our only rule of faith, and also the constitution and laws of the Church of Christ, which in our view becomes a church of churches. It was only by a study of the Sacred Word, that saintly and learned men, in various places and at different times, learned those principles; which good seed, planted by the Holy Spirit in human hearts, has raised up a noble army of confessors, heroes and martyrs, and has girdled the world with their churches.

It is true that we do not find the constitution of the New Testament Church written out in form, or its laws codified in the Scriptures, any more than we find doctrines reduced to a system of divinity, or the details concerning God's great creation declared. The principles and outlines, however, are given, and



these viewed by a sanctified reason are found to form parts of a common whole, which, as they harmoniously blend, give us the system which we hold: a system which we love, not only for itself, but because we receive it as a gift from God.

In the same way doctrines are evolved here and there throughout the Scriptures, as declared by Moses and the Prophets, by Christ, and the Apostles, which when gathered up and placed side by side, not only harmonize, but become complete as a revelation of the divine will. In nature, too, the outlines of creation are declared, while it is left to the astronomer, the geologist, the botanist, and the physiologist, by telescope and microscope, by hammer and scalpel, to declare to us nature's infinite variety and harmonious unity.

In the Gospels we find that Christ by His own words enunciated principles which are the fundamentals of Congregationalism. He plainly said to His disciples, "The princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them: *but it shall not be so among you.*" And when he commands them: "But not ye called Rabbi, for one is your Master, even Christ, *and all ye are brethren,*" He laid down a theory of social and church life, which it is next to impossible to realize in any other system of church polity. Again, in the plain law which our Lord gives concerning offences, and which is found in Matthew xvii. 15-18, principles are involved which it is impossible to literally fulfil and commands are given which cannot in good faith be kept under any other form of church order. Dean Alford says of this, "That *ekklesia* cannot mean the church, as represented by her rulers, appears by verses 19, 20, where *any* collection of believers is gifted with the power of deciding such cases,"

While we pass over the many passages wherein Christ in strong terms alludes to the equal brotherhood of believers, and pause to listen to His last prayer for His followers, and study the formula He gives in the institution of the Lord's Supper; and further when we receive His last command in the great commission, are we not impelled to these convictions: that as it was while He was upon the earth, He was the visible and only Head



of His church, and under Him all were brethren equal in authority and rights, so was it His will that in the churches subsequently developed He should remain their real though invisible Head, and all believers should stand on the broad platform of brotherhood and equality.

Here very important questions arise, namely,—What view did the Apostles take of these teachings which they received from their Master? What plan did they follow in the planting and training of the New Testament churches? Studying these questions by the Acts, but one answer is given throughout, which is to the effect that among the Apostles there was no assumption of ecclesiastical authority; that in their church system there was no shadow of the hierarchy, but throughout the simplicity of Congregationalism is found. A successor to Judas in the Apostleship was elected by the whole church of one hundred and twenty members; the seven deacons were chosen by the church; Paul was received by the church at Jerusalem and sent forth to Tarsus, not by the Apostles, but by “the brethren;” it was to the church, while fasting and praying, that the Holy Spirit said, “Set me apart Barnabas and Saul to the work to which I have called them,” and this the whole body did, then and there designating the first Congregational Foreign Missionaries, which Missionaries on their return reported to the assembled church the results of their labours.

Later on, when Paul and Barnabas with certain others were sent by the church at Antioch to lay before the Mother Church at Jerusalem the effect of Judaizing teachings in their midst, this deputation was received by the whole church, and after considering the case, “it pleased the Apostles and elders *with the whole church*” to send delegates to Antioch with a letter of advice, which letter recognized the church as co-ordinate in power with the Apostles. Further, when we remember that the gift of the Holy Spirit was bestowed upon the assembly as well as upon the Apostles, and see the church when scattered by persecution at work by its members who “went everywhere preaching the Word;” and read afterwards that “then had the *churches* rest throughout all Judea, and Galilee and Samaria,” the only con-

clusion in face of all the facts is that the system of Church government manifesting itself throughout the Acts of the Apostles was essentially Congregational.

Turning to the Apostles' writings we find these facts further declared and illustrated. In more than *fifty* instances the term *ekklesia*, or church, is used to designate a single congregation of believers, while the churches are also frequently mentioned in their plurality, as the *churches* at Cenchrea, Corinth and Philippi. These Apostolic writings declare and illustrate the equal brotherhood of believers, and are addressed to the several churches, recognizing as over them only such officers as are now found in Congregational churches. With regard to church administration we find that Titus was chosen by the church to accompany Paul, and is called the "messenger of the churches." In matters of church discipline, instruction is given to the members of the church to withdraw from those who walk disorderly, and in the case mentioned in 1. Corinthians v. 4, 5, 13, the directions given can be carried out by no other system than that of Congregationalism. Thus, in the Apostles' writings as well as in their acts, we find such references made to the local church and to the churches, to their officers, to their fraternity, and to their administrative action, as to make the conclusion clear that the government of those early churches was what is now known as Congregational.

Not only did the fathers of our faith discover this fact in the sixteenth century, but divines and church historians of other denominations have given testimony in the same matter, as for instance, Lange, Dean Alford, Archbishop Whately, Waddington, Mosheim, Neander and Geisler. In the Brampton Lecture for 1880, by the Vice-Principal of St. Mary's Hall, Rev. Edward Hatch, M.A., entitled "The organization of the early Christian church," it is clearly shown that the idea of the clergy as priests, and of Christian worship as a priestly sacrifice was not primitive but the growth of the hierarchical and sacerdotal system, and shows the influence, especially without the church, which contributed to that growth. Then on the last page but one he says:

"The supremacy of the Episcopate was the result of the struggle with Gnosticism; the centralization of ecclesiastical government was the outcome of the

breaking up of the empire. And if the secret of the past be a key to the future, the institutions of Christianity are destined in the providence of God, in the days that are to come, to shape themselves in new forms to meet the new needs of man. To the general character of those forms many indications point. It would seem as though in that vast secular revolution which is accomplishing itself, all organizations, whether ecclesiastical or civil, must be as the early churches were—more or less democratical; and the most significant fact of modern Christian history is that within the last hundred years many millions of our own race and our own Church, without departing from the ancient faith, have slipped from beneath the inelastic framework of the ancient organization, and formed a group of new societies on a basis of a closer Christian brotherhood and an almost absolute democracy.”

In defining Congregationalism, it has been called both monarchical and democratic in its form of government, and both definitions are true. It is monarchical or theocratic because it recognizes Christ as the supreme and only ruler over the church, and His Word as the only and all-sufficient standard for doctrine and discipline. It is democratic because Christ in His wisdom and love, at the great price of His atonement, has made it free, and has vested all ecclesiastical power in the hands of a believing brotherhood, subject to His revealed laws. Each church is regarded complete and independent, and on account of this prominence given to the congregation of Christian believers, it derives its name, Congregational. Its essential principles may be summarized as follows:

1. Any company of Christians who are sincere believers in Christ and openly profess themselves to be such, may voluntarily associate together under Christ and in obedience to His command for Christian work and worship, and such an assembly is a true and complete church of Christ.

2. Every member of such a church has equal essential rights, privileges and powers with every other; and the united membership have the right and duty, under the direction of God's Word and Spirit, of choosing all necessary officers; of admitting, dismissing and disciplining their own members, and of transacting all other appropriate business pertaining to a Christian church.

3. Every such church is independent of all human outward control of ecclesiastics or of ecclesiastical organizations; and

every church, however small or obscure, is on a level of inherent genuineness, dignity and authority with every other church in the world.

4. While fellowship among the members of the local church is essential to its happiness and success, Congregationalism likewise implies a fraternal fellowship among the churches, and this is required for the maintenance and propagation of its principles. Hence it is both right and desirable that in all important matters affecting the churches at large, counsel should be sought in a fraternal way, and given by delegates designated by surrounding churches when so requested : which counsel, as the word implies, is always subject to the final decision of the church asking for it.

5. The officers designated by Christ to be over His church are of two kinds : the first called Pastors, and who are in the New Testament indiscriminately termed Presbyters, Bishops, Elders or Overseers, whose duty it is to preach the Word, and have the general oversight of the spiritual concerns of the church ; the second are called Deacons, whose office is to relieve the wants of the poor, look after the secular interests of the church, and give general aid to the Pastor.

These fundamental principles of Congregationalism, as has been shown, are found to be the direct teachings on the necessary implications of the Scriptures, and after a trial of three centuries have proved themselves adaptable and equal to every possible emergency and to all surrounding circumstances. Now as always the system is open to avail itself of every new opportunity for the furtherance of Christ's kingdom, and also secures to successive generations the power of a free and fresh rendering of the will of the Lord in relation to the special claims of their own times. By these principles Congregationalists are appointed to stand among the nations a self-governing people.

Congregationalism is an historical as well as an ecclesiastical term, and has a defined historic signification. In the fourteenth century its principles were in a measure apprehended and manifested ; for in Wycliffe and the Lollards and in Tyndale and his companions, we may truly claim an ancestry of our faith. While we do not pretend that these earliest reformers held all that we



hold, still the principles were with them in germ, as is shown by their protest against human authority over the conscience ; in their devout reverence for God's truth ; in their assertion for liberty, and in the exercise of their right of individual conscience. In this succession it matters not whether the name has been Lollard, Separatist, Protestant, Puritan, Independent, or Congregationalist, the lineage has been the same, for all contended for like ideas and for the same ends.

The first effect of the breach between Henry VIII. and Pope Clement VII. was the establishment in England of the Episcopacy, wherein the headship of the church, as by law established, was transferred from the Pope to the King, and the expedient assumed of making Christians by Acts of Parliament. Thus, with all the resources of England at its disposal, and with an intolerance which would not suffer dissent, the work of saving and sanctifying the British Empire was undertaken by the Episcopacy. That a large measure of failure has attended this, is indicated by the serious conflict of opinions on vital points within the church itself ; by the knowledge that the larger part of the nation is outside of the national establishment holding other church connection, and by the fact that Episcopacy as an establishment by law is doomed, and its end is nigh. That this church has had a brilliant record in the past, that since the revival within itself it has been doing a noble work for Christ and the world, and that, with its near disenthralment from the fetters of State bondage, there will be an opportunity for even a brighter future is not questioned ; and notwithstanding the bitter persecutions of the past we accord to it all due honour. Had those enlightened principles generally prevailed within it during the sixteenth century which now obtain, doubtless Congregationalism would have wrought its influence upon the church of England from within instead as now from without.

Another result of the separation between England and Rome in the sixteenth century, was the introduction of Presbyterianism. During the brief and bloody reign of Mary, many of the confessors of Christ were driven to Geneva, Frankfort, and other places, where they learned from the disciples of Calvin Presbyterianism, with which they supplemented their protestantism ; and

with these new lessons returned to England to propagate the system under the leadership of Thomas Cartwright. In those days, however, Presbyterianism, like Episcopacy, contemplated a State Church, and proposed indiscriminately to receive into its fellowship all who were baptized. It called for a change in form rather than a change in spirit; and with the sovereign as its recognized head had to wait her will before it could move in any matter of progress and reform.

After heroic struggles and sacrifices, which were crowned with a brief triumph, Presbyterianism as the recognized church of England was swept away by the restoration of Charles II. and in the memorable second "Black Bartholomew,"—the anniversary of the French massacre having been selected as the day—when two-thousand ministers were ejected from the church and deprived of their livings. Passing through various vicissitudes, by which the greater number of the congregations of the Presbyterian church were involved in Unitarianism, they gradually lost their distinctive principles, so that when William III. ascended the throne of England, English Presbyterianism had altogether disappeared. The Presbyterianism there to-day is a distinct Scotch system, and has no lineal descent from that which so heroically defied Charles and Laud. The advance of this honoured branch of the church of Christ in more recent years in liberty, spirituality and power for good belongs rather to the history of Presbyterianism, which history indicates the progress within its fellowship of those principles for which our Congregational fathers contended, and which unites the two denominations more closely in sisterhood during each successive generation.

A third result of the Reformation in England was the organization of Congregationalism from the model of the New Testament churches. To trace this it seems better to take a brief glance at the lives of some of its leading men in the middle of the sixteenth century.

ROBERT BROWN, a man of honourable ancestry, about the year 1568, entered the University of Cambridge, then the centre of Puritan influence. Pressed to accept a Cambridge pulpit, he declined on conscientious grounds. After passing through a



mental and spiritual conflict, which seriously impaired his health, he adopted the principles of Congregationalism as he found them in the New Testament. In elaborating this system, he taught that all church power resided in Christ, its rightful, absolute Monarch: that Christ had revealed His will to all His faithful believers, making them His vicegerents: that every local church was self-complete, and under Christ was self-governed, and yet was bound in equal sisterhood to every other.

Our Lord had forewarned His disciples that in this world they should suffer persecution, and bitterly was this fulfilled in the case of Brown and his followers. Having gone to Norfolk in 1580, at Norwich he organized a church by mutual covenant with which he was driven into exile. After various vicissitudes he returned from Zealand, broken down in body and mind, when his kinsman, Lord Burghley, gave him the living of Achurch-Cum-Thorp, which he held until his death in 1631. According to his own testimony, he had undergone imprisonment in thirty-two different dungeons, in some of which he could not see his hand at noon-day. Judging the man by the virulent abuse which his enemies indiscriminately heaped upon him; by his writings which still survive and declare his purpose and spirit in his best days; and also by the power and progress of his opinions as witnessed by the past three hundred years, we may safely conclude, that Robert Brown, the Congregationalist, was a man of whom none of his ecclesiastical descendants need feel ashamed. Of Robert Brown, the Episcopalian, we need offer no further apology than the certain fact, that the sufferings he endured in maintaining the principles which we cherish, had cast a cloud over his mind, and left him but a wreck of what he was.

Next in this apostolic succession of church order stand HENRY BARROW and JOHN GREENWOOD. Both were graduates of Cambridge; together they embraced the Congregational faith; for this they were cast into the same prison, and from the dungeon they were on the 5th day of April, 1592, led out to seal their testimony by martyrdom. Henry Barrow was a member of Grey's Inn, and while leading a wild and wicked life became converted, whereby, according to Lord Bacon's words, "he made

a leap from a vain and libertine youth to a preciseness in the highest degree, the strangeness of which alteration made him very much spoken of."

Turning his attention from legal to theological subjects, Barrow was attracted to John Greenwood who had been ordained by the Bishop of Lincoln, but who from conscientious scruples had left the Established Church. These men even while in prison exercised a great influence upon those without by their counsel and their writings. Many and distant pilgrimages were made to visit them in the Fleet Prison and to enquire concerning the ways of truth; while from this place of confinement they issued publications which made prelates tremble with rage, and the chief officers of state endeavoured in vain to find out their authors. Though they sought to carry the secret into eternity with them, there is little doubt now that Henry Barrow and John Greenwood were the authors of the celebrated and much hated "Martin-Marprelate" publications.

FRANCIS JOHNSON was the son of a mayor of Richmond, Yorkshire, and a graduate of Cambridge. Avowing the Presbyterian polity he was imprisoned, and when released retired to Middleburg, Zealand, where he became pastor of the Presbyterian Church of which Cartwright had been minister. Receiving a commission from the civil authorities to gather up and burn all the Congregational publications possible, he diligently set to work and soon secured a complete edition of one of the books by Barrow and Greenwood, which made a splendid bonfire. He was, however, so indiscreet as to save two copies, as he says, "one to keep in his own study, that he might see their errors, and the other to bestow on a special friend for the like use." Superficially glancing at this book he received such impulses that he resigned his comfortable charge, took a ship to London where he sought out Barrow and Greenwood in prison, the result of which was that he became fully persuaded that Congregationalism was right and Presbyterianism was wrong. In 1592 he became pastor of a Congregational church in London, and was afterwards imprisoned. After his release he, with a portion of this "martyr church," which had endured untold persecution,

followed those members who had previously gone into exile, and founded the Congregational church in Amsterdam. There he died and was buried in 1688. For more than a hundred years this church existed, and the building still stands in which they worshipped. It is further worthy of remark that Francis Johnson, as a Congregational exile in Holland, brought out at his own expense an edition of that work which Francis Johnson, the Presbyterian exile, had burned in Zealand.

JOHN ROBINSON is another in this list of worthies who must be mentioned. Entering Cambridge in 1592, he was afterwards made a Fellow of the University, but was suspended by the Established Church for his acceptance of the principles of separation. In 1604 he resigned his Fellowship and became pastor of the Scrooby Congregational Church in Nottinghamshire. This became the celebrated "Pilgrim Church," which, after a severe ordeal of persecution carried on in treachery and outrage, escaped into Holland in the year 1607. After a brief sojourn in Amsterdam they removed to Leyden, where they flourished under Robinson as pastor and Brewster as elder. In 1620, after great deliberation and prayer, with high and holy resolves, the first portion of this Pilgrim Church set sail for the wild shores of this continent, here to found a New England, upon the principles of civil and religious freedom.

The voyage of the "Mayflower;" the landing at Plymouth Rock; the suffering endured with sublime heroism during the first years, are too well known to call for recital here. The growth and influence of that Congregational stock, planted on the virgin soil of the new world, is written in the history of a great self-governing nation of fifty millions of people. How the Pilgrim Church was protected from her enemies as was the "woman," the symbol of the true church, who fled to the wilderness from the persecution of the Dragon, and had a place of safety prepared for her of God, is known to the world. To day Plymouth Rock and Burial Hill are more than national symbols, and the names of Brewster, Bradford, Carver, Miles Standish, Dr. Fuller and others, are known and cherished by the English speaking world.

To HENRY JACOB belongs the honour of establishing the

"Mother Church" of English Independency, for although other Congregational Churches of earlier origin had been formed these had either been extinguished or driven into exile by persecution. Jacob was a native of Kent, a graduate of Oxford and held a benefice at Cheriton. After interviews and discussions with Francis Johnson he resigned his living and went to Zealand, where he was pastor of a church for some years at Middleburg. Afterwards in 1610 he spent some time with Robinson at Leyden. All through his exile he had looked towards England with anxiety and in 1609 had addressed to King James "An Humble Supplication for Toleration," in which he begs that "each particular church may be allowed to partake in the benefit of the said toleration, may have, enjoy, and put in execution and practice this her right and privilege" viz., "to elect, ordain, and deprive her own ministers and to exercise all the other points of lawful ecclesiastical jurisdiction under Christ." In 1616 he returned to England and there organized the historic church at Southwark. After a pastorate of eight years during which the church made good progress he, looking to the new world as a field of greater usefulness, and with the consent of his church, sailed for Virginia where soon after he died and now lies buried in an unknown grave.

Robert Brown, Henry Barrow, John Greenwood, Francis Johnson, John Robinson and Henry Jacob are by no means all of the list of confessors worthy of mention. The lives of these however serve as connecting links in the early history of English Congregationalism, which history they began and prosecuted by their faith, fortitude and zeal, in the midst of persecutions, imprisonments, banishments and martyrdom. Faithfully did they and a host of their followers illustrate the principle "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ, yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things." In spite of the severely repressive measures of the Government, Congregationalists continued to multiply in England and in the last decade of the 16th century numerous churches were formed especially in London, and the East and North-east



counties. They were watched and often their conventicles were suppressed and the worshippers cast into prison where many died.

The following illustrates the sufferings endured during this period. In 1636 Dr. Leighton, father of the celebrated archbishop, on publishing his "Plea against Prelacy," was fined £10,000, set in the pillory at Westminster, publicly whipped, had his ears cut off, his nostrils slit and his cheeks branded with the letters S. S. "Sower of Sedition." Prynne, a barrister of Lincolns' Inn, for writing against stage plays, masques, dances and masquerades, had his ears cut off, and for a second offence had the stumps sawed off. In like manner were many treated for like offences.

The result of persecution was a double emigration to the Continent and to New England. Thomas Goodwin and Philip Rye ministered to churches in Arnheim; Hugh Peters, Professor William Ames, Jeremiah Burroughs, William Bridge, and Sidrach Simpson, all of them men of mark, went to Rotterdam. To New England between the years 1620 and 1640 there came upwards of 22,000 Puritans from English and Dutch ports. They were, as Milton said, "faithful and freeborn Englishmen and good Christians constrained to forsake their dearest home, their friends and kindred, whom nothing but the wide ocean and the savage deserts of America could hide and shelter from the fury of the bishops." Among them were such men as Bradford, Brewster, Winslow, Standish, Winthrop, Dr. Fuller, Roger Williams, and young Harry Vane. Of their ministers it is sufficient to mention John Wilson, John Cotton, Thomas Hooker, John Elliott, Thomas Shepard, Richard Mather, (to be followed by his distinguished son and his still more distinguished grandson, Cotton Mather,) John Davenport, Jonathan Mitchell, and John Wise. These were some of the men who planted the American church and founded a civil government on the principles of God's word; men of whom England, in that age, was not worthy. From the wild shores of New England these men sent back to Old England their Congregational literature, which books and pamphlets, expository and defensive of the "New England way," were scattered

broadcast throughout the land proving elements of great usefulness during the period of the Commonwealth.

We take a glance at England in the middle of the 17th century and what do we see? The Puritans driven to bay have turned upon the wolves of persecution and are masters of the situation by the English Revolution. In a sudden and extraordinary way Congregationalism has the ascendancy in the Commonwealth; and this, not by force of numbers but by the force of their principles and the characters of their men. At their head stood OLIVER CROMWELL, surrounded by the invincible ranks of his faithful Ironsides; while to his council among others came such Congregationalists as Sir Harry Vane, Henry Burton, John Milton, John Owen and John Goodwin. The principles which they held were precisely suited to the emergency, being at once revolutionary, republican and religious; while their theory of the church fell in with the spirit of the Commonwealth. Inspired by their love to divine truth and human freedom, it is not so wonderful that men like these "through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens."

The Congregationalists of the Commonwealth were by no means so ascetical as many have imagined; neither did they look so doleful, nor dress so ridiculously, or act so absurdly as believers in "Hudibras" would understand. Among them were many gentlemen of graceful bearing, of noble demeanor, and of genial sympathies. There were of their number some of the noblest blood of England, and a great number of gentle descent who, in the midst of the multitudes of yeomen, would crack a joke and ring an honest laugh. While the church of the Commonwealth repudiated Prelacy and refused to embrace Presbyterianism it did not set up Congregationalism. It was nothing more than an institution for preaching and teaching, and the ministers were only acknowledged by the State in the capacity of instructors.

This bright, though brief, period of the Commonwealth, when



England guided by her uncrowned king, made herself felt as a power of righteousness among the nations, and opened that book from which others since have been laboriously learning of liberty and equal rights, may not now be dwelt upon. In it our fathers uttered a prophecy and enjoyed a foretaste of this nineteenth century in which we, their children, live. They being dead yet speak and their words are, "At a great price purchased we this freedom, keep it at every sacrifice."

With the restoration of Charles II. the shadow went back upon the dial of English life and liberty; and upon the Congregationalists of the Commonwealth were the vials of wrath poured with bitter vengeance. In the case of the Presbyterians who had been chiefly instrumental in bringing the king back, some attempt was made to include them within the church of the restoration, but with regard to Congregationalists not an effort at comprehension was put forth. They did not ask for this; they only wished to be tolerated and nothing more, and even this illusion was very soon dispelled.

In 1661 the Corporation Act was passed, which disqualified non-conformists for municipal offices; in 1662 the Act of Uniformity, which drove more than two thousand ministers out of the church and silenced all who did not conform; in 1663 the Conventicle Act, which prevented the meeting of non-conformist congregations—not allowing in any house more than five persons besides the family to meet at once; in 1665 by the Five Mile Act no non-conforming minister was allowed to come within five miles of any corporate borough; in 1670 the Conventicle Act was made more severe; and in 1673 the Test Act made all non-conformists ineligible for offices under the crown, either civil, naval, or military.

During these dark days of repression and persecution, our Congregational fathers lived with patient courage, learning through their sufferings. And well they might, sustained as they were by the infinite grace of God, and while their obscurity was made illustrious by the counsel and teachings of men like John Owen, late vice-Chancellor of Oxford, prince of theologians; Thomas Goodwin, dealing with the didactic subjects so pleasing to

his age ; John Howe beholding the " vision of God " and dwelling in " the living Temple ;" Joseph Caryl and William Greenhill, rich in expository lore ; and Theophilus Gale, of the " Court of the Gentiles." But the children of the former Commonwealth could not be slaves, hence the Revolution of 1688, by which James the II. was forced to abdicate, and which enthroned William and Mary of hallowed memory.

By the passage of the Toleration Act in 1689 the laws of England began to mitigate towards the non-conforming portion of her subjects, and from that time to the present Congregationalism and Liberty have gone hand in hand with even pace advancing from strength to strength. To-day her voice is heard declaring that the anomaly of a National Church which is not National, of a Protestant Church supported by the State which is not evangelically Protestant must pass away. Edward Miall, one of our number recently called away, was the first to revive the agitation which brought about the disestablishment of the Irish Church, a man who for many years has been foremost in promoting these reforms. He rests from his labours but his works do follow him.

In Canada for many years the State Church cast its shadow over and declared its intolerance in the land. One case will suffice to illustrate the facts. At the beginning of the century a Congregational church, now called Chalmers, was organized in Quebec, and three years later the authorities peremptorily refused to grant to the minister the required official register. This decree not only debarred our ministers of ministerial status, but also prohibited them from officiating at baptisms, marriages and funerals, as such acts were illegal without a register. The injustice of this act was exposed by the pastor, the Rev. Mr. Benton, in a published pamphlet entitled " Law and Fact," for which he was sentenced to six months imprisonment and a fine of £50 sterling, the real cause being the crime of non-conformity. It was not until 1833 that this decree was abrogated by Act 6 William IV. Chap. 19, and religious freedom accorded to Congregationalists. The last vestige of a State Church in Canada was swept away in 1855 by the secularization of the Clergy Reserves brought

about largely by the influence and sentiment of Congregationalists.

In Nova Scotia so early as 1759 Congregationalists succeeded in securing a charter of religious freedom from Governor Lawrence, which among its provisions included the following: "Protestants dissenting from the Church of England shall have FULL LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE, and may erect and build meeting-houses for public worship, and may choose and elect ministers for the carrying on of divine service, and the administration of the sacraments, according to their several opinions, and all such dissenters shall be excused from any rate or taxes to be made or levied for the support of the Established Church of England."

To estimate the marvellous influence of Congregationalism throughout the world is utterly impossible. But for it, religion in many places of England would have almost become extinct, and by it the religious institutions of America were planted and took deep root; while in the Colonies and in Heathen lands it has proved of lasting benefit to society and the State. Congregational preachers from the first have been men of influence. Of one of them, James Foster, Pope, sang his praise saying:

Let modest Foster, if he will, excel  
Ten Metropolitans in preaching well:

while Isaac Watts, Philip Doddridge, Edward Williams and Dr. Pye Smith were among those of whom any age might well be proud. In the last generation, England produced such men as Henry Rogers, Joseph Gilbert, J. Angell James, Dr. Winter Hamilton, Dr. Ralph Wardlaw, Dr. Robert Vaughan, his distinguished son Alfred Vaughan, Dr. Halley and Thomas Binney, concerning whom it may be said "there were giants in those days."

In the United States during the eighteenth century, names like these were written both in Congregational history and the National history as well: Jonathan Edwards, Joseph Bellamy, Samuel Hopkins, Ezra Stiles, Joseph Lathrop, Stephen West, Benjamin Trumbull, Nathaniel Emmens, Mathew Strong, Asa Burton, Timothy Dwight, Abel Holmes, Jedediah Morse, Ebenezer Porter and Leonard Woods. Then in the last generation among others were Moses Stewart, Edward Payson, James

Marsh, Bela Bates Edwards and Lyman Beecher, who will be recognized as master minds by men of many succeeding generations. These and men like them have done the chief thinking of the age, and greatly influenced the theology of all portions of the Church of Christ. "Yea, verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world."

The following leading features have manifested themselves in the History of Congregationalism for the past two centuries which cannot now be dwelt upon but only indicated.

I. The adaptability of Congregationalism to surrounding circumstances has been attested. With its simplicity and completeness of organization, now as in the days of the apostles, it is suited to all outward exigencies. By it we see Churches organized and complete, in prison and on shipboard, in exile and in the unbroken wilderness, while the fruits of Foreign Missions are readily gathered into its Churches in all climes and among all classes. It is the only polity which can form and conduct a Church regularly without outside authority and help, and create out of itself an authorized ministry.

II. While its creed conserves it does not fetter Congregationalism. The Bible, which Chillingworth called the creed of Protestantism, is our creed. Although in generations past and present, Congregationalists have openly declared to the world the leading truths which their churches hold, these have never been put forth as standards requiring subscription. One result of this is that we have never been bound by the human opinions and phraseology peculiar to any age, and the grip of the dead man's hand is not felt; while we have ever been at liberty to bring forth from the treasury of God's Word, things *new* and *old*. John Robinson, in his farewell to the Pilgrim Fathers, said, "God hath more light to break forth out of His Word, and our attitude has ever been that of standing, ready to receive such light." Another attested result is that throughout three centuries Congregationalism has been true to the evangelical faith and has stood as Protestant of Protestants.

III. It has been a chief characteristic of Congregationalism that it has contended for the spirituality of Christ's Church. Its



existence began in this vital principle, and its natural antagonism to a State Church is for the same reason. The fathers and founders of our faith were men of deep and fervent piety, and it was through this that they relinquished place, position, outward peace and temporal ease; embracing a system opposed to pride, ambition and all that is human. Throughout all its history Congregationalism has made it an essential claim that its ministry should be godly, and its membership should be converted. That this is a vital principle is declared by the fact, that when for a time a church has been negligent in this, dire disaster has been the invariable result. A vivid illustration is given by the experiment of "the half way covenant," adopted in New England in 1662, ultimately leading to the results of Unitarianism, which the churches were compelled to cut off and cast out. If Uzziah's hands might not steady the Ark of God, no more may the unregenerated be recognized in this system either as ministers or members, for if Congregationalism is not spiritual it is nothing.

IV. Congregationalism from the first has possessed a fervent Missionary Spirit. A leading purpose of the Pilgrim Fathers in coming to this continent, was the conversion of the native inhabitants; and John Elliot, famous as the "apostle of the Indians," was the first of Protestant missionaries to the heathen, in whose steps that host should follow with courage, devotion and success like David Brainerd, John Williams, Ellis, Morrison, Moffat and Livingston. The charter of Massachusetts made missionary work a duty resting upon all the settlers, and as a result we find that when in 1696 there were only 130 Congregational churches in New England there were thirty Indian churches with thousands of "praying Indians." It was their missionary enterprise which called into existence the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, the oldest Missionary Board in Great Britain.

In 1795 the London Missionary Society was organized; and in 1810 the American Board; followed in 1846 by the American Missionary Association; which Societies have gone into all the world preaching the Gospel and are planting the nations with Christian churches. Together they annually employ more than six thousand and fifty European and native missionary agents,

and expend about one and a half million dollars in the work. Who can question the fact that when that "great multitude which no man can number" shall be gathered "of all nations and kindreds and people and tongues" before the throne of God, thousands upon thousands shall bless the missionary enterprises of Congregationalists.

In the Home Missionary work Congregational churches in every land are banded together, the strong to help the weak, the favoured to preach the Gospel to the destitute, while in all catholic evangelical missionary work, domestic or foreign, our churches, considering their number and means, have stood in the front. Without this fervent missionary spirit Congregationalism would not be true to itself, for is not its essence "sanctified individualism;" and does it not emphasize the duty and power of the individual believers as a good steward of the manifold blessings of God to propagate the Gospel?

V. Congregationalism professes and exemplifies the broadest Christian Catholicism. In relation to other Christian ecclesiastical systems it stands as a rival to none and an ally to all. To these systems it is liberally giving its cardinal principles, and persists in bestowing them, even when declined with thanks. Dr. Baird, in the history of New School Presbyterians, honours us by saying of that secession: "All our trouble came from Congregationalism." With a generosity not to be commended, and in a catholicism two catholic by far for our own interests, we have given ministers and members without stint to other denominations, where they have been received with open arms and held in high honour. Congregationalists alone organized and sustain their great foreign missionary societies on a catholic basis, while the American Home Missionary Society with the same too generous spirit contributed the chief part of ministers, members and means for at least four hundred Presbyterian churches outside of New England. That our system is catholic, as well as apostolic, is further illustrated by the facts that by its ordinances, doctrines and practices it does not debar any true Christian from membership within its churches, but accords him the freest fullest fellowship; and that its polity furnishes the only system



whereby all other churches may be united in one catholic and apostolic church.

VI. Congregationalism has ever been the symbol of civil and religious freedom. It was born in travail and agony for liberty in an intolerant age, as the persecutions, imprisonments and exile of our fathers testifies and it was baptised by the blood of martyrs. The proud pre-eminence is given to Robert Brown of having been the first writer in the English tongue to state and define the doctrine of toleration. The few Congregationalists, forming so small a part of the Westminster Assembly, were, according to Baillie, habitually pestering that august body with plans for liberty of conscience, "not only for themselves but, without any exception for every man never so erroneous so long as he troubled not the public comfort." Again, he says, "the great shot of Cromwell and Vane is to have a liberty for all religions, without any exception." In that age it must be remembered Presbyterians looked upon toleration as the very "man of sin." To trace this contest for full, civil and religious liberty would be to write the history of the denomination and repeat facts which the leading historians have told. Lord Brougham makes the following declaration:

"They are a body of men to be held in lasting veneration for the unshaken fortitude with which in all times they have maintained their attachment to civil liberty; for I freely confess it, they, with the zeal of martyrs; with the purity of early Christians, the skill and courage of renowned warriors, achieved for England the FREE CONSTITUTION she now enjoys." Hume says: "Of all Christian sects in Great Britain, this (the Congregational) was the *first* which during its prosperity as well as adversity, always adopted the principles of toleration."

VII. Earnest promotion of Education has always been a leading characteristic of Congregationalism. Its first founders were all educated men who had been trained in England's honoured universities, and who, at great sacrifice, went forth to plant their principles in the sanctified thought and intelligence of the age. As a system it cannot long exist in ignorance, and has but few attractions for the thoughtless. Shut out from England's national universities for more than two centuries and a half, theological colleges were established for the education of the ministry, and free universities were founded.

Owing to the oppressive acts in the reign of Charles II. it was with the greatest difficulty these schools were maintained. One of these academies was under the charge of Theophilus Gale, another under Samuel Cradoc, another under Thomas Doolittle, and another under Richard Frankland and others of the ejected ministers; these were only preserved by the most frequent change of place so as to elude the vigilance of the authorities. Under toleration these schools could do better work, as the history of one under the Rev. Samuel Jones, first situated at Gloucester and then at Tewkesbury, testifies, for there were educated Archbishop Lecker, Bishop Butler, Samuel Chandler and Jeremiah Jones.

For more than a hundred years the struggle to abolish university ecclesiastical tests has been carried on, and in 1854 a great victory was achieved by the passage of the Oxford University Reform Bill. This was followed in 1871 by the Ecclesiastical Test Act, which has done all that was desired with the exception of abolishing the ecclesiastical headship and fellowship in England's renowned universities. Since then many Congregationalists have been attending the national universities, and in the space of twenty-one years fourteen senior wranglers at Cambridge have been Nonconformists.

Of the first settlers of New England one out of every two hundred planters was a graduate of Cambridge or Oxford. One of their own number tells us, "After God had carried us safely to New England, and we had builded our houses, provided necessaries for our livelihood, reared convenient places for God's worship, and settled the civil government, one of the next things we longed for and looked after was, to advance learning and perpetuate it to posterity; dreading to leave an illiterate ministry to the churches when our present ministers shall lie in the dust." No sooner, therefore, did the Pilgrim Fathers plant their principles upon this continent than they opened the common schools, establishing that principle which has been wrought out in the common school system; for in 1653 it was enacted that there should be a schoolmaster in every town in the colony.

As early as 1636 Harvard College was founded; in 1700 Yale;

and in 1769 Dartmouth ; to be followed by that host of colleges planted in the various States of the Union, in which there are now one hundred and fifty Congregational professors, besides thirty-six in theological seminaries. Of this, Joseph Cook says, "Congregationalists have founded more colleges than any other denomination in New England." Moreover, by its Foreign Missionary Societies, schools and colleges, as well as churches, have been planted in many of the dark places of the earth, the number now being not less than fifty. This has been the record ; one which must be progressively maintained would we hold our place and wield a true spiritual power in generations to come. The golden fruits of literature which this tree of knowledge has born would make a bibliography of many volumes.

VIII. The numerical increase of Congregationalism has been gradual but encouraging. At the beginning of the conflict between Charles I. and the Parliament it was, as a denomination, so feeble and obscure as to be hardly taken into account ; but in the end, by the victory of Nasby, it was master of the situation. From the time when Congregationalism was chiefly within the limits of the Fleet Prison and the ship "Mayflower" until now, only three life times have passed away, and the churches number to-day about four thousand each in England and America, the rate of progress having been singularly even in both countries. In the United States at the beginning of this century the denomination was scarcely known outside of New England. Then, for fifty years the fatal "Plan of Union" for the prosecution of Home Missions was formed with the Presbyterians, and by it the lion and the lamb lay down together, but, unfortunately for our brethren, the innocent lamb of Congregationalism was within the maw of the ravenous Presbyterian lion. During the last quarter of a century, however, their progress has been about 100 per cent.

The fact that our numerical advancement has not been in proportion to that of some other denominations is not altogether to our discredit ; for it must be borne in mind that our strict terms of communion, our emphatic testimony against oppression, and our spirit of catholicity have not facilitated a rapid progress. However were

we to include those denominations like the Baptists, whose form of government is Congregational, we should have among those speaking the English tongue a grand total of about forty thousand churches. In addition to this the fact remains that, outside of the church of Rome, the doctrine of Congregational freedom is now almost universally acknowledged.

IX. This question is raised: does not the history of the past three hundred years declare the weakness as well as the strength of Congregationalism? We frankly answer in the affirmative. That there is weakness in it is assured from the fact that it must be administered by fallible men. Because imperfections come out of a system we may not conclude that therefore the system is weak, for then nature and every earthly affair would be so, there being imperfections found in them all.

It is matter of history that the extreme to which Robert Brown's church carried its personal watch over its members was the rock on which they ultimately split, and by the same means elements of discord were introduced into Francis Johnson's church by reason of his having married a somewhat gay widow whose dress offended the puritan taste of some of the members. We likewise have the recorded fact that the denomination has suffered incalculable harm from too great emphasis having been given to the idea of church independence on the one hand and too great stress placed on the power of associated sister churches on the other hand. It is true that the spirit of Diotrophes, desiring the pre-eminence, is sometimes sadly felt in our churches, but no one questions the fact that Diotrophes was a member of the New Testament church and was resisted by St. John. (III. John vs. 9.)

There have been those who have flippantly spoken of Congregationalism as a "rope of sand." There is truth in this. It is a rope of sand, every grain of which should be magnetised by divine grace and thus by its own inherent property adhere to every other—it is a rope of sand, which when fused by the love of God, is made stronger and more enduring than bands of steel. Without that love and grace, is it not infinitely better that any church system should be like the simple innocuous grains of common sand.



We calmly face our difficulties and meet cavils by asking if other systems of church government are as free from weaknesses as are ours? and who can or shall exercise the franchise in Christ's church unless it be the men and women whom Christ has enlightened, regenerated and sanctified by the Holy Ghost!

A tree is known by its fruits, and after the vicissitudes of three centuries we point to those of Congregationalism without shame or confusion of face. May we of the present generation prove true children of our noble sires, that our children's children may reap the benefits of their ancestry as we do of ours. Shall we not in the records of three centuries read this as a revelation from God concerning Congregationalism, "nourish it for there is a blessing in it!"



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